

DEC '93



# P-Flag EDMONTON



## P-Flag Christmas Party...

will be held on Friday December 3rd at 8:00p.m. in the West Edmonton Village Administration Center. 17311-69 Avenue. Bring your own beverages, call Cindy to R.S.V.P. and to arrange what food to bring.  
HOPE TO SEE YOU ALL THERE!

*Merry Christmas*

## GALOC

Once again Gays & Lesbians on Campus have invited P-FLAG to speak at one of their meetings. Any parents who would like to attend the meeting on Tuesday, February 8th at 5:00 p.m. Please let us know at the next regular P-FLAG meeting, the meeting is held in the Athabasca Hall at the University of Alberta. We have visited Galoc in the past and the students were very receptive to us.



TENTATIVELY SPEAKING... We have been asked to possibly provide a guest speaker(s) to relate a parents experiences & field questions for a University Family Studies & Phycology course. If you are interested let us know at the next meeting.

### Are You Interested In:

Saving Money?  
Lower Fuel Consumption?  
Increased miles per gallon?(10-20%)  
Increased horsepower and RPMs?  
Greatly reduced exhaust emissions?  
Overall greater engine performance?

Call Carol at 456-5928 for more information.



## "I'm With You"

Candlelight Vigil at the Legislature  
Saturday, December 11, 6:00 p.m.

These are times of uncertainty and despair for many. With layoffs and cutbacks, many people fear what the next day will bring...or will not bring. We need to think on these things and be present with one another.

Bundle up and bring your candles. We'll change the night into light.

For more information call:  
Suzanne Cowles [REDACTED]



## HAPPY HOLIDAYS

Next regular P-flag Meeting:  
Tuesday, January 18, 1994 @ 7:30 p.m.

For More Information phone Lynne at [REDACTED]

### NEWSLETTER INPUT

If anybody has any interesting articles (either reprinted or originals) or cartoons for the newsletter please phone Joan at [REDACTED]

EDMONTON VOCAL MINORITY  
NEXT PRODUCTION:  
Saturday February 19, 94  
at 8:00 p.m.  
Convocation Hall

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A WOMAN FOR LEAR'S

# Rocking the Boat

Deborah Blair Stevens  
of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

by Jane Howard

Nobody in the stately Chestnut Hill neighborhood where Deborah Blair Stevens grew up would have expected her to study for a doctorate, let alone in human sexuality. It didn't seem strange to anyone, though, when she decided to drop out of the University of Pennsylvania in 1957, after her junior year. Debby, as everyone called her then, was 19 and about to marry a man seven years older. Like her father, he was an alumnus of Penn and the owner of a family business.

Soon Deborah was tending to her three children and fulfilling her proscribed duties as wife and hostess amid the 19th-century heirlooms of her house in the Bucks County village of Doylestown. She made most of her clothes from fabrics bought on

frequent European vacations, served 15 years on the local hospital board, and went to meetings of the Daughters of the American Revolution. Both of her daughters, Kathryn and Blair, now 33 and 31, wore her wedding gown when they were married. Deborah now has three grandchildren who call her Grammy.

But the careful, expected pattern of Deborah's life began to unravel five years ago, when she decided to go back to Penn. Majoring in psychology, she got her B.A. and went on to earn her M.S. in psychological services; now, at 54, Deborah is a doctoral candidate and teaching assistant in the human-sexuality program of the Graduate

Deborah in Philadelphia's Fairmount Park: from the DAR to transsexuals.

School of Education. Two years ago this May she moved from Doylestown to a tenth-floor apartment of her own in Philadelphia, filling it with self-assembled furniture. In January of this year, after 34 years of marriage, Deborah and her husband were divorced.

She traces these changes to an event that occurred on Friday, February 13, 1987, a date as important to Deborah as her birthday. On that day her youngest child and only son, Don, then 21, told his parents he was homosexual and planning to live with a certified public accountant named Steve. Today Deborah refers to Steve with much affection as "my son-in-law," but the reve-

lation initially had the force of an earthquake. In her own words . . .

When Don came out to us, he said there was only one thing he wouldn't do to help us learn to deal with his sexual orientation: He wouldn't try to change. He had been through too much pain, during and beyond his adolescence, coming to terms with it himself. Knowing how shattered we would feel, he brought us books on the subject, and for a while the three of us all went to an excellent therapist.

The therapist seemed amused when I told him we had never even known anyone gay. "Sure, you have," he said. "Ten percent of the human race is homosexual." The crisis forced me to sit back and take a careful look at myself and my life. I saw how complacent and self-satisfied I had been, believing I had a perfect marriage, perfect husband, and children who always did what was expected of them. I also knew that Don was too precious to me to be lost in a system that said he was defective and deviant.

Many parents in this situation ask, "What did I do wrong?" but that never entered my mind. What did enter my mind was how ignorant I'd been of my son's pain, and how much I wished that he had

been able to come to his father and me in his early teens, to tell us of the pain that he had experienced in his journey to self-acceptance. But I raised him the same way my parents had raised me, not to rock boats.

Maybe it wasn't too late for me to rock a few boats of my own. As a sociology major in the '50s, I had wanted to become a criminologist and work with disturbed juveniles, but that was certainly not the done thing at that time, and I was easily talked out of it. At age 50 I resolved to try again, beginning with one course in social psychology. At first I sat in class with my gold Mark Cross pen and rings from knuckle to knuckle thinking, What the hell

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am I doing here? But before long I took off—it was like, I'm home!

In the spring of 1990 my son and I graduated together, in cap and gown, Don receiving his master's in psychological services, while I got my bachelor's degree. Along the way he had suggested courses and professors he thought I'd like, but it was only by chance that I discovered the field of human sexuality. I knew this was what I'd been looking for after I took an intense, one-week summer course that covered not just sex but sexuality, emphasizing issues of power and control.

I'd never thought about those things in my years of board meetings, needlepoint, and maintaining my reputation as the best cook in town (I had enough equipment in my kitchen for three catering firms). I enjoyed all this, probably because I had so little else to do. One of our traditions, inherited from my parents, was a formal

## A Woman for LEAR'S

*Slowly, I'm doing things people like us don't do. One thing is certain: I wouldn't go back to my old life for anything.*



Deborah with son, Don, an AIDS researcher: "I'm scared sometimes, but my son's courage has inspired me."

dinner party every New Year's Eve for some 150 friends. My mother clung to the theory that formally dressed people would behave properly. Every New Year's we learned otherwise.

But most of the time everyone and everything was under control. I certainly was. As a WASP female raised and socialized in the 1940s and 1950s, I abided by the messages my family transmitted. As tall people we were urged not to slouch, and my father told me that I shouldn't worry that no one would ever call me pretty, because my basic common sense would take me where I needed to go. At the time I simply accepted this as the truth; not until years later, in

therapy, did I think how chilling a thing this was for a father to tell his child.

Only after his death did I learn that for many years he had a mistress in New York, where he worked. My mother knew of this, but she never discussed it, or anything else of a sexual nature, except to warn me before my wedding night not to be "too disappointed."

I didn't move out of our Doylestown house until two days after I received my undergraduate degree. I thought my husband could adjust to my going back to Penn, and he seemed to, until it dawned on him how much graduate work would interfere with my role as wife, mother, and

hostess. I managed to get two student loans, one state and one federal, and rented the apartment with some money of my own.

Most of the women who once were my friends seemed to agree that I should have been home fixing my husband's dinner instead of at school. It's mind-blowing to think how my fellow DARs would react to talk I hear all the time now, in and out of class, about T-people—as transsexuals are called—white slavery, cross-dressers, child abusers, and various fetishists. Once we were assigned to write a paper about a deviation we thought might be problematic to us professionally. I had to say, "I have a problem because I'm not having a problem." Having visits in class from people who fit these descriptions took away my capacity for shock and gave me the capacity to understand.

My Chestnut Hill upbringing left me with a lot of behaviors I'd like to be rid of. I've been trying not to seem so unflappable and even not to be so punctual, but it's hard. And I haven't had much luck with my efforts to look funky, even when I wear red tights and flashy silver costume jewelry. "Face it, Deborah," a friend said recently. "You don't *do* funky." I've often been told that I intimidate people: When I feel uncertain, I come across as aloof. The first time I led a class of my own, for a group of displaced homemakers, I had to tell them, "If I seem not to care, it's because I'm very nervous, but please know I do care, and I'm going to give this all I have."

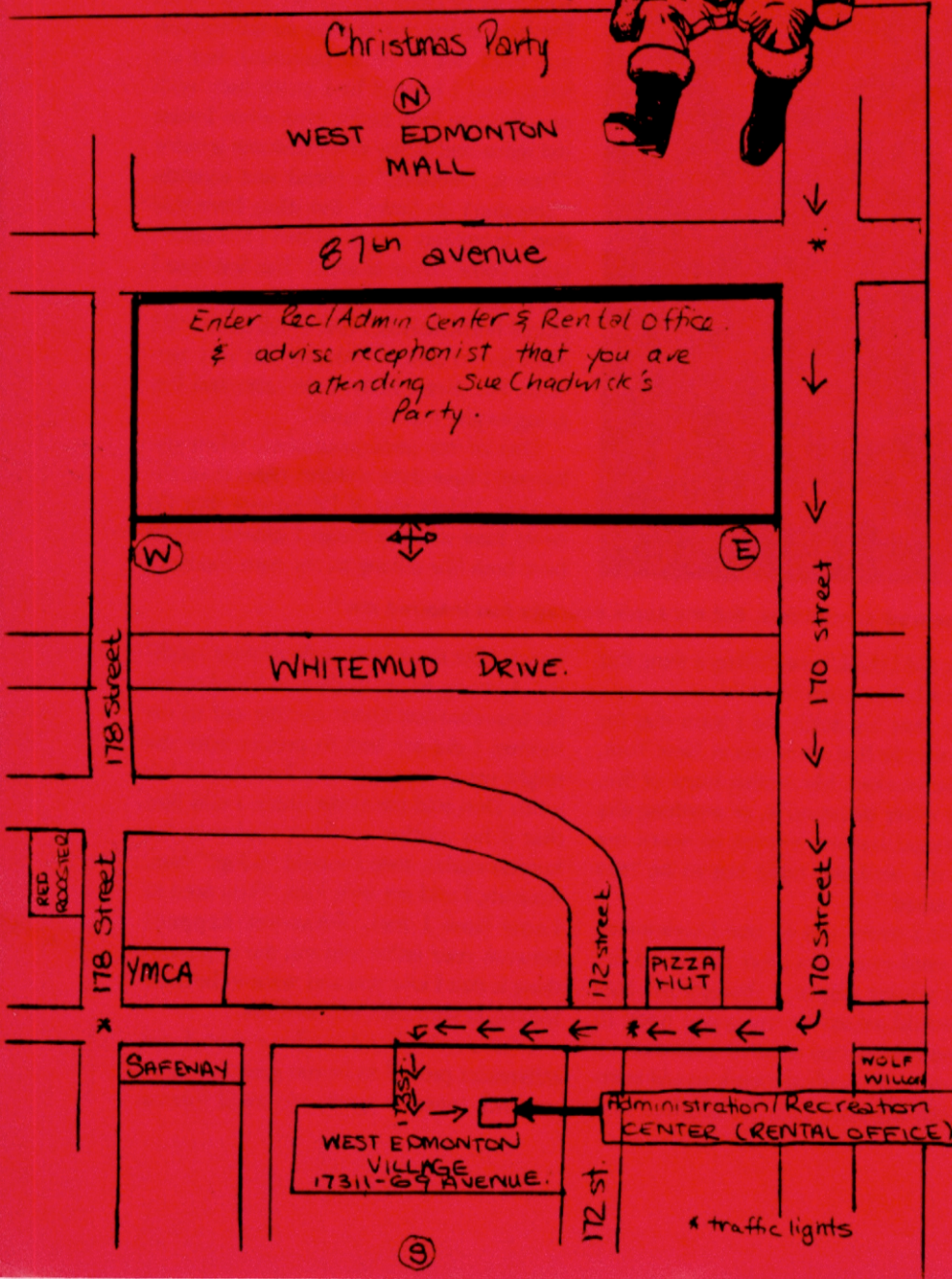
One of my undergraduates, when she learned I have three children older than she is, said, "Holy shit, if I'd known that I'd never have said the things I did—it would have been like talking to my own mother."

I said, "Do me a favor, *talk* to your mother." A young fellow student confided to me his apprehension about coming out to *his* mother. I did my best to predict how she might react, remembering how I had felt when Don told me about Steve. I told him that if his mother couldn't deal with his homosexuality, then I would "adopt" him. Recently, I told my own kids, "You need to know how I feel. Whatever happens between your father and me, the important thing is that I love you and want to be there for you in your own relationships."

I left my husband thinking that if our differences proved to be too great for us to get back together again, we could form a



# Peace Joy & Love



new kind of relationship, perhaps living apart, but seeing each other and going on joint vacations. I felt no need for a divorce, because though I know never to say never, I doubt very much that I'll remarry. But now he thinks that he might want to. So he's the one who filed the papers, which means I'm the first divorced person ever in my family.

Slowly, I'm doing a lot of things people like us don't do. Recently I've gone out with some men who actually listen to me. One of them has helped me to discover some things about myself that—contrary to my mother's wedding-night warning—are anything but disappointing.

Professionally, if all my dreams could come true, I would teach at the college level, work with disturbed juveniles, have a small practice, and go out in the field to talk to people, doing ethnographic research. One of the papers I most enjoyed writing was based on two lengthy taped telephone conversations with a person who had started out as a man, then undergone sex-change surgery to become a woman. As a male he had commanded a lot of authority in his business, but all that changed dramatically after he became a she. Suddenly she had to think constantly about not seeming aggressive or antagonistic.

I'm scared sometimes, wondering how much of a struggle my dissertation will be and where I'll find the money to pay back all of my loans. But one thing is certain: I wouldn't go back to my old life for anything. My son's courage has inspired me. And maybe my father was right after all: My common sense has led me to where I belong. ☺



**A BIG Thank-you**  
to Sue & Colin for kindly  
providing the party room  
for our Christmas Party.